

On Imperialism, Past and Present

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I was moved to write on this topic by Trump's threats regarding friendly Canada, Greenland, and Panama. Imperialism is the strong subjugating the weak, just because they can. America has fought against it on the world stage, but it is far from unknown here at home.

Slavery comes to mind. Nine of our first twelve presidents owned slaves: Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Pierce. The 1619 Project, so named because the first slave ship landed here in that year, has drawn extremely paranoid reactions, claiming that "it indoctrinates us into hating our country" --as if teaching about racism creates racism. As if testing for cancer creates cancer. I've read the book: it has dozens of scholars documenting the plain facts regarding slavery in America.

However, slavery in the New World began more than a century earlier with Columbus. His 1492 "discovery" of an already occupied continent is a glorification. Furthermore, his seafaring was also much about finding gold for Spain. (If you doubt this, see extensive quotes from the Captain's Logs from his three voyages across the Atlantic, these in *The Conquest of Paradise*, a 500-page work by Kirkpatrick Sale.) To mine gold in the Caribbean islands, Columbus enslaved peaceful natives. In the following era, slavers would kidnap some 10 million West Africans, transporting them in chains to both Americas for plantations raising sugar cane and cotton.

Consider, too, our war against Mexico. President James Polk was an expansionist who worked to find a pretext for war. Two decades before the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln was a young congressman. Here's what he said of Polk's 1845 invasion of Mexico: "Trusting to escape scrutiny by fixing the public gaze upon the exceeding brightness of military glory --that attractive rainbow that rises in showers of blood, that serpent's eye that charms to destroy-- he plunged into war." Most people do not even know that we captured Mexico City and that it was by this conquest that we acquired what is now California, Texas, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and parts of New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming.

And the Civil War that killed some 700,000 was not about some lofty concept of "states' rights" but about racism and the right of people to enslave other human beings.

The President of the Confederacy was Jefferson Davis, with Alexander Stephens as Vice President. In his 1861 inauguration "cornerstone speech," Stephens laid out "in black and white" the reason for secession and war. Of the rights enshrined in our Constitution, he declared: "Those ideas were fundamentally wrong. They rested on the assumption of equality of races. This was an error. ...Our new government is founded on exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests upon the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery --subordination to the superior race--is his natural and normal condition." This is what displaying a Confederate battle flag stands for.

As the American frontier moved West, it did so with the mindset that Native Americans were "not using the land in the best way" (agriculture); therefore, they obviously had no right to it. This idea, called Manifest Destiny, was often genocidal and sometimes even voiced the

blasphemy that God was on its side. In 1864, The Denver newspaper printed its full-throated endorsement of Governor John Evans' call to eradicate the Indians: "A few months of active extermination against the red devils will bring quiet, and nothing else will."

That mentality never went completely away. In 1957, the novelist Ayn Rand said on the Johnny Carson Show, "Just because Indians were here first doesn't mean they should get to live here." Only weeks ago, Ann Coulter, prolific author and commentator representing the radical right, showed us what a vile person she is by posting these horrific words: "We didn't kill enough Indians." --Ever wonder why not everyone celebrates Columbus Day?

There has been boundless good in our nation's past; however, these are facts, too. But rather than accept them, Trump loyalists are busy rewriting history by glorifying, mythologizing, and lying --even in children's books—which truly does qualify as indoctrination.

And in full revisionist mode, Trump has cozied up to Russia's Putin and, like him, is casting a covetous imperialist eye on other countries. In an April interview, Trump said, "I run the country, and I run the world!" Would it surprise anyone if he, too, as with so many arrogant others with the strongman complex, would want to be "a war president?"

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